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CHAPTER XVII.

WOMEN TEACHERS ON THE MORAL TRAINING GIVEN IN
ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS.

Communications from—

Mrs. WOODHOUSE, President of the Association of Headmistresses; Headmistress of the Clapham High School, S.W. (Girls' Public Day School Trust).

Miss FLORENCE GAESDEN, a member of the Executive Committee of the Inquiry; Headmistress of the Blackheath High School, S.E. (Girls' Public Day School Trust).

Miss CHARLOTTE M. MASON, Founder of the Parents' National Educational Union.

Miss P. LAWRENCE, Roedean School, Brighton.

Miss H. BYLES, Headmistress of the Salt Girls' High School, Shipley.

Miss W. HOSKINS-ABRAHALL, and others.

(i) *The comparative ethical value of different school studies. Is it desirable that more practical work and manual training should be introduced into the curriculum?*

(i) *Reply from Mrs. Woodhouse :—*

History and literature are the subjects in the curriculum that offer the best, because most natural, field for the training of moral judgment, for the moving influences of ideals, and for the deepening of sympathy and insight.

The introduction of more practical work and manual training is, in my opinion, desirable, not simply on utilitarian grounds, but for the sake of an increased correlation between theory and practice, and for the encouragement of every effort towards the expression of an idea.

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(2) *Reply from Miss W. Hoskyns-Abrahall:*—

Granted that the teacher has the right ability history and biology would be found to be two of the most fruitful subjects. Literature, to be effective in this way, should not be a school study, but simply read for its own sake. Work in physics and chemistry tends to the development of a love of truth in older pupils. It is highly desirable that more practical work and manual training should be introduced into the curriculum.

(3) *Reply from Miss Charlotte Mason:*—

My general impression accords with that of Herbart, that morality is not to be expected from the uneducated; and I would add that there can be no intelligent morality without much intelligent occupation with what are called the "Humanities". It seems to me that intellectual inanition during school life is responsible for many of the moral defects we deplore: for example, loose opinions, lax principles, certain evils in schools, want of finality in judgment and decision, unworthy or frivolous pursuits in after life, the shirking of responsibility, etc.

Also, it appears to me that our educational advances are rather in the way of improved methods of teaching than in that of affording the scholar a wider field of such knowledge as should tend to the gradual and unconscious formation of principles and opinions. Direct moral teaching cannot supply the place of wide and intelligent culture.

[Miss Mason proceeds to refer to the curricula of the Parents' Union School (P.N.E.U., 26 Victoria Street, S.W.) as a practical illustration of her view.]

(4) *Reply from Mrs. Mumford (with the co-operation of Dr. Alfred Mumford), Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester:*—

Ethical value of mathematics great:—

1. The distinction between right and wrong in mathematical work is clear and definite; it is not a question of

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taste or judgment. The work is either right or not; if not right, it can be demonstrated to the child beyond a doubt; in the beginning of mathematics such proof should be made by the child itself.

2. It follows from this that mathematics trains the child in the habit of accuracy—accuracy of thought, accuracy of statement. An inaccuracy which may seem to the child small and unimportant may occasionally be shown to invalidate the whole conclusion; the moral application of this is self-evident on the most casual observation.

3. Training in accuracy of statement is part of the larger process of training in the art of reasoning—the deduction of correct conclusions from given premises. The power to reason is needed in the formation of moral judgments.

4. Mathematical work is, however, much more than merely a process of simple deductive reasoning. Insight into the problem is required; this a child is capable of learning at the age of say twelve to fourteen. She can then learn to split up the special problem given for solution into the smaller problems involved in it. Some of these smaller problems have been solved already, some are self-evident; only a part requires to be examined anew. The same need of insight into the question at issue occurs when the child in its simple way is called upon to face *moral* problems. In the process of deliberation, of weighing in the balance the opposing forces, the growing child can be taught to detect certain clear and definite lines of right action, can see what is new in the particular combination of circumstances which makes it difficult to decide what action is right. If the child is so trained the question can more easily be solved as in the case of a somewhat complicated mathematical problem. As in mathematics when the child is started on a piece of new work she feels

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"I know that and that for a start," so in moral problems. The power of analysing a difficulty into its component elements, and by dealing with these in detail realising the solution of the whole, is not only a possibility but a necessity in life, as it is in mathematics. Many grown-up people appreciate a difficulty but cannot analyse it, they remain helpless in front of it, and being helpless become hopeless, and the opportunity for action becomes lost.

5. The benefit of mathematics for girls is that it compels them to meet difficulties in an unemotional way, and to realise that there are things which cannot be dealt with emotionally.

6. Much of the value of mathematical work depends on the pupil *arranging* her material in proper sequence. Orderly arrangement means orderly thought—the habit of orderly thought encouraged by *good* mathematical work is of infinite moral value.

7. Especially in mathematical work (but the same will hold true of all good school work) I have felt the necessity (if the best results are to be obtained) of children having to find out and correct their mistakes for themselves. Intellectually and morally, in adult life as in childhood, there is not sufficient development of the powers of wholesome and effective self-criticism.

(ii) *How far, under existing conditions, are systematic moral instruction and training given to the pupils, through the religious lessons or otherwise?*

Reply from Mrs. Woodhouse :—

Instruction is regularly provided for by

1. Scripture lessons twice a week, one on the Old Testament, the other on the New.
2. Daily learning and repetition of verse from Scripture.
3. Addresses at the beginning of the term to each form

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by the form mistress, who takes some portion of the rules and shows how it is based on principles. These informal talks are directed towards the practical realisation and application of some group of ideas or leading thoughts.

4. Addresses at the beginning and end of term by the headmistress to the lower and upper school respectively, when the concept of some cardinal virtue, such as loyalty, or courtesy, is analysed and applied, or some special aspect of the meaning of Christmas or Easter is dwelt upon.

In addition to systematic instruction, some training in faith and duty—what to believe, and what to do—cannot but be given to those under her influence by the teacher who is awake to her opportunities and consequent responsibilities, and who uses them aright.

(iii) *Do you think that in addition to the influence exerted on the pupils by the tone of the school, by the organisation of its work and play, and by the personality of the teachers, more should be done to provide systematic moral instruction and training as a part of education? If so, should it be,*

(a) *though systematic in plan, almost entirely indirect in method, e.g., given through the teaching of literature and history; or*

(b) *arranged as part of the definite religious teaching of the school; or*

(c) *planned in the form of regular lessons making a graded course of moral instruction on non-theological lines; or is some combination of these methods the more efficacious?*

(i) *Reply from Miss Harriett Byles :—*

One lesson a week is arranged on the time-table for each class in "Ethics"; this term is used to cover a combination of definite religious teaching, though entirely unsectarian, with moral instruction on non-theological

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grounds. Bible lessons are not always ethical teaching, and the preparation of a Gospel for examination purposes tends to obscure the moral instruction. Conversation or questions from a Bible lesson often suggest a topic to discuss in an upper class, e.g., "Culture and Restraint," from "the strait gate and the narrow way". It seems desirable to give short courses on citizenship, on the life and ideals of people of other lands, great events of ancient history, Buddha, Confucius, the Stoics, etc., sometimes to deal very directly with schoolgirl morality. It would be difficult to use the teaching of history and literature for systematic moral instruction. These subjects have undoubtedly a high ethical value, and the cultivation of a literary taste is a bulwark against vulgarity, frivolity, etc., but they must be taught as history and literature and not didactically.

(2) *Reply from Miss Hoskyns-Abrahall:*—

A graded course of moral instruction is desirable.

Yet more is needed a definite idea of the different *stages* of moral development in children, and a progressive standard of conduct and ethical consciousness for each successive stage.

(3) *Reply from Mrs. Woodhouse:*—

The living personalities of the teachers, and the tone and influence of the school in accordance with its best traditions, form by far the most effective and pervasive means of moral education. In the last resort, everything depends upon the character and influence of the staff. The teaching of Scripture would lose more than half its value if it were performed perfunctorily as a mere subject of detached instruction, and not reinforced by living example, by the ideals animating and underlying the whole work of the school. The keynote is set by prayers as the first act and aspiration of the school day, and as far as possible the time-table

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is arranged so that the first and the last lesson of the week is Scripture.

In addition, however, to this indirect influence, systematic moral instruction and training should find a further foothold in education by

(a) the teaching of literature and history. In connection with this such training will be of most value when it is spontaneous, arising naturally from reflection on the subject-matter;

(b) the definite religious teaching of the school.

"Regular lessons making a graded course of moral instruction" do not seem, in my judgment, likely to be as efficacious as the combination of (a) and (b).

(4) *Reply from Miss Mason:*—

Though the personality of its teachers must needs have great influence in a school, it is an influence which should not be consciously exerted. I believe that what is called "personal magnetism" in a teacher represses unduly the individuality of his scholars. Personal initiative is apt to be lacking in pupils who consciously bring their whole conduct to the test of the teacher's approval. On the other hand, as for definite religious teaching, I think its aim should be that indicated in St. John xvii. 3. Ethical teaching flows naturally from the study of the Gospels, as also from that of the Old Testament and of the Epistles. I have not tried the effect of a graded course of moral instruction on non-theological lines. Such a course seems to me unphilosophical and likely to result in the production of persons whose virtues are more tiresome than their failings.

(5) *Reply from Miss Punch (member of the Bournemouth Education Committee):*—

A combination of graded moral instruction with lessons in history and literature might be given with great advantage in the junior classes.

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(6) *Reply from Miss Mary Scampton (member of the Coventry Education Committee) :—*

I deem it very important that systematic moral instruction and training be given to the *elder* children. The years fourteen to eighteen form the most plastic impressionable period—when the why and the wherefore are *consciously* realised, and the attitude of a lifetime begins to bud. I think moral teaching, indirect in method, should strongly pervade the whole school work and play; but *also* that what makes for character and both public and private responsibility should be *intellectually* clearly grasped as well. This conviction has grown during the years in which some 200 girls of this age have passed through my hands as pupils.

(7) *Reply from Miss Florence Gadesden (Headmistress of the Blackheath High School, and member of the Executive Committee of the Inquiry) as contained in her answers to questions at a meeting for oral evidence :—*

I cannot conceive such a school as mine benefiting at all by special lessons in morals. Moral instruction goes through the whole of school life and teaching, and should be a matter of guidance and example rather than of direct teaching. I should shrink from putting on the school time-table that certain hours would be devoted to moral instruction. Occasions may, and often do, arise when a "talk" with a form on some moral point is of the greatest assistance to the children, but the subject should be one of living interest to them at the time. A set of lessons which might not be adapted to their wants at the moment or to their environment would leave them uninterested and cold. But lessons on patriotism and civic duties can be given.

I believe that "direct systematic moral teaching" would quickly become mechanical, dead—whereas "indirect

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"moral teaching" following, as it must, on the personality and influence of the sympathetic teacher and on the present needs of the pupil can but be human, spontaneous and living.

(8) *Reply from Miss P. Lawrence (Roedean School, Brighton) as contained in the memorandum prepared by her after giving oral evidence to the Committee :—*

[After saying that "the whole of school life and discipline is arranged with a view to moral training and in that case is systematic in that it has a purpose behind it"; that "the most important matter is the creation of a good tone, i.e., an atmosphere in which certain primary virtues are taken for granted and in which public opinion is shocked at transgression"; that the discipline of the school must be sound; that the personality and example of the teacher are very important factors in moulding the character of the young; that "the school work has its chief ethical value in teaching thoroughness, attention and concentration of mind, perseverance and the punctual performance of a given task at the right time"; that "the study of history and literature, in so far as they appeal to the imagination and call out nobler emotions, have a decided moral effect"; and that "organised school games give daily practice in good temper, in co-operation for the common good and in subordination of self to the common welfare," Miss Lawrence pointed out that all this moral training, though continuous, is indirect and mostly unconscious. "A girl does not consciously go to the playground and learn to be unselfish: she goes to play the game and finds that she must put self aside to a certain extent if she is to enjoy it." She then analysed the more direct influences which are consciously brought to bear upon the young in order to train their moral sense, remarking that these are "the weakest of the agencies which we have at our command".] Her memorandum proceeds:—

First, religious instruction. The religious lessons may often be the vehicle of direct ethical instruction; but this instruction cannot be systematic in the sense in which mathematical and historical instruction is systematic. The ethical questions must be discussed as they occur in the subject-matter.

Secondly, school addresses, Sunday talks and sermons. These again cannot be systematic. To be effectual they must grapple with the need of the moment, must take hold of something that has actually occurred in the school or in the life of the individual, and, if successful and sufficiently impressive, they may move the children to

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abstain from some wrong course of action in the future or stimulate to greater effort in the right direction. On the whole, however, the immediate effect of any address or sermon is not great. The cumulative effect of religious lessons, sermons and addresses is to make a kind of moral background to the life of the individual which has a certain influence and which it might not be safe to omit, but the indirect influences are a thousand times more potent.

The only direct influence that can at all be counted on to have any practical effect is private talks with the individual child.

No doubt a clever and sympathetic teacher could elaborate a course of graduated lessons in morals which would interest the class. But whether these lessons would produce the smallest effect on the daily conduct of the class is, I think, open to doubt.

Such classes would have to be put down on the timetable at a certain hour each week. But the moment when one human being can influence another comes rarely, like an inspiration, and is dependent on the mood of both teacher and taught alike. And how can this mood be counted on to occur mechanically at a given moment each week?

You might get splendid discourses and essays on the beauty of truth from the habitually untruthful and the value of unselfishness from the most selfish. Knowing is not being able to do. The same objections do not apply to religious instruction. The subject-matter is so sacred that the appeals to the emotions need only be made occasionally when the mood is there, and the moral talk, if it comes, comes as a surprise and arises out of the subject-matter under discussion; there is a reason for its introduction. Moreover, there is the sanction of custom and tradition for religious teaching 1,900 years old, if not older; it is accepted by all as the right and natural thing.

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Moral instruction, as a class subject, would have to explain and justify its position, and would therefore be less sure of its effect.

(iv) *What special difficulties have teachers to contend with in connection with the home life of their pupils, e.g., luxury; social claims upon the child's time; want of home discipline?*

Reply from Mrs. Woodhouse :—

The teacher has a real difficulty in the face of such facts as the lack of power to "endure hardship," the dread of pain and of dulness, which children see in only too many of their homes. It is this kind of thing, rather than positive luxury, that is a hindrance in a middle-class school. Many parents have not realised that the "power to do without" is an invaluable preparation for life under any conditions, and make no effort to train their children therein.

The encroachment of social claims upon a schoolgirl's time can be avoided to a certain extent by the observance of the unwritten rule (to which parents will usually try to conform) to refuse evening engagements except for Friday and Saturday.

(v) *Could more be done, without undue interference with school work and discipline, to encourage parents to take more personal interest in the schools, with a view to closer relationship between school and home?*

Reply from Mrs. Woodhouse :—

The work of the Parents' National Educational Union here deserves recognition and extension.

(vi) *How far are the schools at present successful in connecting their work with their pupils' subsequent duties in life, e.g., the training of girls for the duties of home life?*

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(1) *Reply from Mrs. Mumford:*—

As regards young mothers, the very large majority of these in the middle classes are utterly unprepared in every way for the duties of maternity. They are frequently badly prepared in house management and domestic details, and (this is to my mind even more important) they are almost invariably badly prepared as to any knowledge of the right upbringing of children. The monthly nurses that are in attendance after childbirth are only very inefficiently equipped to provide any other knowledge than the mere physical care for the first few months of infancy. There is nowadays greatly increased care of the mother, and a wiser knowledge of the physical needs of the first few weeks of infancy; but this improvement in training does not extend to the physical care of children after the first few months, nor does it in any way touch the *mental or moral questions involved in upbringing*. A course of child study—combined with a housewifery course—among the upper classes of girls at a high school would be of benefit whether or not the girls subsequently became mothers. Should they marry and have children the benefit is obvious; but greater understanding of child nature on the part of all grown-up people would be an infinite gain both to the grown-up people themselves and to the children. Moreover, it would serve as a basis for a study of human nature and of mental and moral problems in their widest sense. School education must of necessity be academic in its first stages; connecting links must constantly be found to bring these academic studies into contact with real life. A girl needs to have some basis for understanding human nature quite as much as dressmaking, housewifery or earning her living in any capacity.

(2) *Reply from Miss Hoskyns-Abrahall:*—

Preparation for ordinary home life and for *parenthood* should form part of the curriculum of all boys' and girls'

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schools. The lack of this lies at the root of many social evils.

(vii) *Advantages and disadvantages of co-education of boys and girls, especially during adolescence.**Reply from Miss G. B. Ayres:*—

The girls of a mixed secondary school often suffer from the head being a master. The first assistant mistress, now insisted upon by the Board of Education, has often a very restricted authority and not a free hand.

(viii) *Special moral difficulties for girls during school life, more especially in boarding schools.**Reply from Miss Hoskyns-Abrahall:*—

In my experience the moral difficulties for girls during school life are easily met by *definite teaching* concerning parenthood and life, and by plenty of healthy interests.